

## National Survey: declining drug use continues

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The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) today welcomed the release of a report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare that indicated a continued drop in drug use.

Commenting on the results, the Chairman of the ANCD, Major Brian Watters, stated "It is extremely pleasing to see the downward trend in the use of illicit drugs in Australia continue. According to the report the number of people who have used an illicit drug in the last 12 months has now decreased from over 20% in 1998 to 16.9% in 2001 and 15.3% in 2004. In regard to marijuana use we have seen a welcome decline from 17% in 1998 to 12.9% in 2001 and 11.3% in 2004. These trends are significant and represent very encouraging results for those of us working in this field, but more importantly for the many individuals, families and communities affected by drug use."

Noting the significant fall in tobacco smoking which has dropped to 17.4%, Major Watters added "Australia is experiencing one of the lowest rates of daily tobacco smoking - in the world. Whilst recognising this important result we also need to remain vigilant in our efforts to reduce the rate of smoking in specific sub groups of our population such as Indigenous people or young people."

According to Major Watters, "The ANCD also noted that the average age of people trying illicit drugs for the first time has increased from 18.6yrs in 2001 to 19.4yrs in 2004, which is in line with one of the aims of the Australian National Drug Strategy to prevent and delay the uptake of illicit drugs. The evidence is quite clear that delaying the start of any drug use, reduces the likelihood of developing problems with drugs. Whilst our aim is for people not to use drugs, it is important to realise that this delay in drug use can profoundly reduce the potential for harm in the long term."

Major Watters stated "The results in this report show that the Australian Government's Tough on Drugs Strategy, together with the programs of the States and Territories, is having a significant impact on the level of drug use in Australia. To sustain these results it is up to all of us, governments and community, to continue to work together with a balanced approach involving health, law enforcement, education and family. Particular attention must also be given to addressing the emerging trends towards the use of substances such as ecstasy and the continuing problems with alcohol."

The report, 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: First Results, is the 8th in a series from 1985.

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*The ANCD is the principal advisory body to Government on drug and alcohol issues.*

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